

9.04  
1476 -

ESO 1476

**THE AGRICULTURAL ESTABLISHMENT:**

**WHERE TO FROM HERE?**

**PLEASE RETURN TO  
REFERENCE UNIT  
AGRICULTURAL ECONOMICS EXTENSION**

**Leroy J. Hushak**

**May, 1988**

**Department of Agricultural Economics  
Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center  
The Ohio State University  
Columbus, Ohio 43210**

THE AGRICULTURAL ESTABLISHMENT:  
WHERE TO FROM HERE?

Leroy J. Hushak

...to the endowment, support, and maintenance of at least one college where the leading object shall be, without excluding other scientific and classical studies and including military tactics, to teach such branches of learning as are related to agriculture and the mechanic arts.....in order to promote the liberal and practical education of the industrial classes on the several pursuits and professions in life (First Morrill Act, Section 4, 1862).

Is there a future for agriculture in this basic mission of the Land Grant established in 1862, the Hatch Act in 1887, the second Morrill Act in 1890, and the Smith-Lever Act in 1914. Farm numbers have declined from around 6 million farms in 1940, to 2.2 million in 1986. Further, at least 1.6 million of these units are not commercial farm operations, but rather are operated as part-time farms by households which are fully employed off the farm or are retired. Some have proposed that the USDA and Census eliminate these 1.6 million units from their data system, i.e., stop including them as farm firms, to reduce the costs of tabulating farm level data. If such a change was made, could agriculture survive as a political force strong enough to support the Agricultural Establishment with 600,000 farm firms? My guess is that it could not!

Padberg (1987) states that our discipline (of Agricultural Economics) came of age by helping a stream of "country to city" migrating students. This statement is also true of our Colleges of Agriculture. And now this traditional stream of students is disappearing. There are few farm children left to recruit through 4-H and FFA; undergraduate enrollments are declining. We have yet to develop a new mission statement attractive to a larger student clientele. Our graduate programs have maintained student

numbers, but not in the more traditional areas of production, management and marketing. The budgets of Cooperative Extension Services have been declining for many years. Experiment Stations have been able to maintain research budgets at relatively higher levels in large part because the researcher is least constrained by the mission of the Land Grant system. In addition, individual researchers can more easily obtain outside funds to supplement their research efforts.

For many years, the USDA and Colleges of Agriculture have conducted research and education programs for 1) Agricultural Industry, 2) Rural Communities, 3) Natural Resources, 4) Home Economics, and 5) 4-H. With the exception of Home Economics and possibly 4-H, all other areas have been "farm dominated". We have never become comfortable with firms or groups that are not "farm". We talk about serving the "Food and Fiber Industry"; yet most papers and talks are back to exclusive consideration of the farm after the first page or five minutes. Reisch (no date) makes the point that even though we proclaim all of agriculture as our domain, we do little about any but the production area.

With few exceptions, we have not been willing to devote significant resources to research and education programs on rural community or natural resource issues. Even here, what we do often has a strong orientation to the farm. Four-H has partially made the transition from farm to urban, but here too one must question its future when those who knew 4-H as farm youth are no longer around to encourage children to join 4-H rather than scouts, Indian guides and other competing clubs.

Cameron (1983), in a paper which focuses on the management of budgets during conditions of decline, argues that "doing the right things" is much

more important than "doing things right". It is time for Colleges of Agriculture and the USDA to start asking about "right things to do", i.e., about future "missions" of the Land Grant system. Schuh (1987) is right that Land Grant Universities, which I interpret to mean Colleges of Agriculture, have lost their way. The non-agriculture components of Land Grant Universities are leaving Agriculture far behind in developing missions for the 21st Century. Schuh is also right in saying that the Land Grant University concept is worth preserving. What cannot be preserved is the traditional 100 plus year old Land Grant focus on traditional agriculture by the agricultural establishment. Shrinking budgets and student enrollments suggest that at least this portion of the Land Grant mission is obsolete. We must examine how that mission can be brought into the 21st century. If we are to survive, if we are to reverse shrinking programs and budgets, if we are to remain an integral part of local, state and national policy debates, then we must look at the choices before us while they are still choices.

#### OUR FUTURE IMAGE

We must raise the question of our image. Vice President for Agriculture, Fred Hutchinson of The Ohio State University, talks about repositioning to effectively serve our future clientele. We must decide to whom we want to appeal, or whom we want to serve. Whether we talk about new directions or changing the name of our college, however, there is a fundamental point which appears to be overlooked in most discussions. Most people who work within the agricultural industries, or food and fiber, no longer identify with production agriculture, or food and fiber for that matter. Over the past 30-40 years we have moved farm children from the farm

to agri-industry. But there are few farm children left. How do we appeal to the children of our farm to agri-industry graduates, most of whom no longer consider being part of food and fiber as significant to their futures? To whom do we appeal?

Frank Rhodes, President of Cornell University, discusses three challenges resulting from the success of the Land Grant movement. The first of these is the recruitment and retention of minority students, an issue with which all universities are struggling. Second is the responsiveness of higher education to pressing national needs. When the Land Grant system was established in 1862, 75 percent of the American people were employed on farms; today it is less than 3 percent. And third is the substance and style of undergraduate education. We must educate people for both thought and action.

To me, the key question is: how can we reposition the college so that we can look beyond agriculture, to address issues such as those raised by Rhodes, while at the same time continuing to serve production agriculture and developing more effective programs for food and fiber in general? To take one example, suppose we repositioned our farm, agribusiness, horticultural, forest products, and small business management programs and resources into a single small/rural business management program. Such a change would potentially draw thousands of small business owners/managers from rural areas into our programs who are in greater need of management skills than many of our current clientele.

Would such a change provide the political support needed to increase our resource base? If it does, then it may be true that we can serve farmers, horticultural firms, forest product firms, feed and grain dealers,

food processors and other traditional clientele more effectively than we do currently, even with as few as 40-50 percent of management resources, because we would then have much superior resources as compared to current staffing. We may be able to staff with a tax expert, a finance expert, a sales expert, etc., where 30 percent of the time of each of these persons provides superior services as compared to one person who covers all of these aspects spending full-time with farms or agribusinesses.

It is critical that Cooperative Extension and Resident Instruction reposition so that their missions are mutually consistent. We underrate the impact on student recruitment of County Extension Agents through the programs they conduct. If we were to launch a small/rural business Resident Instruction program, it would be important to have a similar program for small/rural businesses through Cooperative Extension.

Cooperative Extension probably has the most difficult task of repositioning, as compared to resident instruction or research, because it must deal with current support groups most directly. It must convince these support groups that we are not abandoning them while directing resources to generate new programs where we expect increasing financial support in the future.

We dare not limit our aspirations to careers and programs in agriculture? We must extend our image beyond agriculture while expanding our agricultural image to all of agriculture. Agricultural sciences will not do it! We need to think in terms of a College of Rural America, a College of Small/Rural Business, a College of Natural Resources and Rural Communities, a College of??? Perhaps the word Agriculture can remain as part of our identification; maybe it would be better if it did not. How we

identify ourselves in the name of our college and of our programs has more impact on image than we realize.

#### SOME POTENTIAL NEW DIRECTIONS

Irrespective of how we define our future mission, we need to significantly increase the rigor of college undergraduate programs. While many of us needed remedial courses at the Land Grant university because our rural high schools did not offer the necessary mathematics and science courses, our children often graduate from high school with preparation in mathematics and basic sciences which exceeds what we require in our agriculture programs. How can we expect to be attractive to superior high school students if our programs are less rigorous than their high school programs.

In particular, we need to expand the core of basic liberal arts and sciences courses (Bloom, 1987). At The Ohio State University, Agricultural Economics B.S. graduates currently do not have the mathematics, statistics, and economic theory needed to enter graduate programs in Agricultural Economics, unless they go beyond the basic requirements. In the future, a return to the basic concepts of life (Humanities, "Great Books") is a needed addition to training for action (Bloom, 1987). At Ohio State, it is difficult even for those students who want this background to obtain it because our college-based programs are constrained to satisfy the needs of several departments. If we cannot strengthen our college-based programs, an alternative is to let our stronger departments develop their own programs so that they can compete in today's market.

Several potential new directions for Colleges of Agriculture and the USDA have been identified. This discussion is not intended to be exclusive,

but suggestive of future possible mission directions. Many of the suggestions are issues we already address, but in repackaged or redirected form. For example, the redirection of management resources to an expanded small/rural business clientele seems a natural. We have relatively large numbers of management faculty resources. We use these resources to address the problems of a declining clientele (farm and agribusiness). In addition, this clientele is becoming more corporate, and we face more direct competition from business schools who serve the corporate clientele as a core function.

At the same time, we continue to ignore or minimally serve large numbers of small individual proprietorships, including horticultural and food processing firms, who serve residents of rural communities, including farm households. The proprietors of these firms, many of whom do not have schooling beyond high school and do not have advanced management education, come much closer to fitting the original objective of "education of the industrial classes" than the large farm and agribusiness firms on which we now focus. These proprietors have need for basic management education. They can be served by both Cooperative Extension and Resident Instruction.

While U.S. food shortages in the future are unlikely, this is not true of many other parts of the world. As a world leader in agriculture, being involved in world agricultural development has large potential returns to the U.S. We have a vested interest in seeing that other countries do not adopt production techniques which are environmentally degrading or excessively resource depleting. Sustainable agriculture, substitution of flow for stock resources, deforestation and water pollution have both



international and domestic components. International aspects of these issues have large potential impacts on the U.S. environment.

In many ways, the viability of the rural community is more critical to the well-being of farm households than is the farm situation. Many farm households currently earn substantial proportions of their income from off-farm sources. Traditional agricultural policies of subsidies to farmers will not solve the viability problems of rural communities. Programs such as the Ohio Cooperative Extension Service's "Retention and Expansion of Existing Businesses in Rural Communities" program is likely to have much larger impacts on community viability than commodity subsidies. Rural communities need leaders to carry out these programs and they need the assistance of Outreach Education in order to learn how to use state and Federal resources which are available to them. No one is likely to serve these needs in our rural counties if Cooperative Extension does not take on the task in larger degree than it has at this time.

#### IS THERE A VIABLE MISSION?

To conclude, there are viable missions on which Colleges of Agriculture and USDA can build. I have suggested incorporation of the total rural community and an international perspective. Others are more competent to suggest how their disciplines can look to and beyond food and fiber. An expanded vision is necessary. We find ourselves in the same situation as rural communities which can no longer survive on farm activity alone. Those rural communities in decline are those who struggle to survive on the farm economy alone. Those rural communities which are dynamic and growing are those which have looked beyond the farm, beyond agriculture, to alternative sources of growth and development.

## REFERENCES

- Bloom, Allan. 1987. The Closing of the American Mind. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- Cameron, Kim. 1983. "Strategic Responses to Conditions of Decline: Higher Education and the Private Sector." Journal of Higher Education, Vol. 54, No. 4, pp. 359-380.
- Padberg, D. I. 1987. "Agricultural Economics: Finding our Future." American Journal of Agricultural Economics, Vol. 69, No. 5, pp. 883-889.
- Reisch, Kenneth W. No date. "Projecting a Positive Image for Agriculture." College of Agriculture, The Ohio State University.
- Rhodes, Frank H. T. 1987. "Recasting American Education for the 21st Century." National Association of State Universities and Land Grant Colleges Centennial Morrill Lecture. unpublished manuscript, Cornell University.
- Schuh, G. Edward. 1986. "Revitalizing Land Grant Universities: It's Time to Regain Relevance." Choices, Second Quarter, pp. 6-10.